

# TEACHER'S NOTES

## What is oral history?

Oral history is spoken history collected from ordinary people talking about their lives, experiences and views on the world around them. Everyone has a story to tell which is unique to them. Some people can share memories of involvement in a big event like the Second World War but everyone can share memories of their everyday lives and of changes to their families and communities.

Oral history is about recording the memories of things a person has experienced or witnessed themselves rather than something they have heard about. This means that oral history interviews only record the memories of one lifetime or generation at a time. When a person dies their memories die with them. Their personal history, told in their own words, is lost forever if it hasn't been recorded.

## Why use oral history in the classroom?

Oral history adds a great deal when used as an additional source material in the classroom. Books, maps, documents and photographs can't tell us everything about the past. Many books and documents focus on big historical events and famous people. Oral history gives us the opportunity to hear ordinary people talking about big events or indeed just their every day lives. It can help bring other source material to life.

By inviting a wide range of people to tell their stories oral history records the voices of people often excluded from traditional history.

Oral history can be particularly effective when studying your own locality as pupils may find it easier to empathise with another "local" who is talking about places that may be familiar.

# TEACHER'S NOTES

## Memory, fact and opinion

Like any source material, oral history recordings shouldn't be used in isolation but should be used with a variety of sources to verify accuracy.

Memory is a funny thing. We all forget things over a period of time, or remember things in a different way. Sometimes we mis-remember things. We might get a date wrong or remember two similar events as one event. Our memories are coloured by our later experiences, opinions and perhaps by what others have told us.

## Preparing to use oral history

### Separating fact from opinion

When using oral history it is useful if pupils can recognise the difference between a purely factual or objective statement and an opinion based or subjective statement. Much of oral history is a mixture of the two but having a clear idea of what each is separately will help pupils make judgements about evidence included in oral history testimony and in fact any source material.

Here are some suggestions on how to introduce children to the objective and subjective:

- Get pupils to write a list of positive and negative adjectives relating to a particular object or subject e.g. school uniform, school dinners or an animal (like a fox). This could be done individually or as a class. When the list is complete divide the words into factual and opinion based words. (KS2)
- Choose one or two newspaper or magazine articles with both objective and subjective language. Get the pupils to circle factual words or sentences in one colour and opinion based words or sentences in a different colour. (KS2 and KS3)
- Get the children to write several versions of an everyday event – perhaps the morning routine before the start of the school day. The first should be factual e.g. I got up at 7am. I had Weetabix for breakfast. I walked to school with my brother.

# TEACHER'S NOTES

Next get them to add in opinions and feelings to the account e.g.

I got up at 7am even though I was really tired and wanted to stay in bed. I didn't want breakfast but my mum made me have Weetabix which I hate. It tastes like wet cardboard. I walked to school with my brother who is really annoying because he hums all the time.

Get the children to talk about the differences between the two accounts. Which is more interesting? Which gives more information? Get them to analyse the second account. Which added bits are opinion and which bits are enhanced facts?

E.g. It is an enhanced fact that the child hates Weetabix. It is opinion however that Weetabix tastes like wet cardboard!

(KS2 and KS3)

(see also Active listening skills in the next section)

## Creating your own oral history records

Getting children to carry out oral history interviews can aid learning in many different ways. It encourages speaking and listening skills, promotes confidence and inter generational contact as well as illustrating the importance of the experiences of others. It can be an important tool which can help learning across the curriculum as any subject area can be covered by interviewing people.

### Thinking about questions

An oral history interview needs a variety of questioning techniques. Some questions will need to invite precise answers e.g. When were you born?

Most of the questions however need to be open ended to invite comment, description and opinion. It is important that the questions are neutral and don't lead the interviewee to a particular response e.g. Ask "What was your childhood like?" rather than "You must have had an unhappy childhood?"

# TEACHER'S NOTES

## **The yes no game**

Playing the yes no game is good fun but also helps children to think about closed and open ended questions.

How to play: one pupil asks the questions, the other answers them. The aim for the pupil answering is to avoid answering yes or no to any of the questions asked. Set a time limit on the game of 1 minute. The pupil asking the questions fires as many questions as possible trying to get the answerer to say yes or no.

The pupils could work in threes and take it in turns to ask the questions, answer the questions or be timekeeper. The winner is the pupil who lasts the longest without saying yes or no.

## **Active listening**

When carrying out oral history interviews pupils need to actively listen to the person they are interviewing. This means paying attention, making eye contact, asking questions, repeating information and not interrupting inappropriately. Some of these active listening skills are needed when listening to and interpreting completed oral history interviews too.

- One way of encouraging active listening skills is through role play. Pupils could work in groups and act out the dos and don'ts of active listening in a variety of situations e.g.
  - A baby sitter being given instructions on feeding and putting to bed a baby
  - Group of children being given instructions on a school trip

Encourage children to work through the possible consequences of not actively listening. (KS2 and KS3)

- Active listening skills can be encouraged through debate as well. Pupils should understand that a debate is a discussion or argument of a point. It is important that they understand debating is best when arguments are based on research and opinion. Good debating behaviour should be emphasised e.g. taking turns, listening to others and respecting others opinion. Pupils should research a subject area. They can do this individually or in teams. Pupils should realise they only need to include research in the debate that helps their argument.

# TEACHER'S NOTES

There are several ways to organise a debate which may be suitable for different age groups or abilities:

- Divide the class into two teams – one for and one against the motion. Each team should nominate a team captain who will present their argument. The team should decide together what information to present to the class to support their argument.

The team captains present the information to the whole class. The whole class then has a free vote for or against the motion. (KS2)

You can give each team the chance to have a second speaker to respond to points made in the first round of arguments. (KS2 and KS3)

- A balloon debate is a slightly more complex way to present arguments. The class is divided into around six groups and given a different role in the chosen debate e.g. environmentalist, local councillor, business owner, local resident. The six chosen speakers stand in an imaginary balloon and argue their case from their viewpoint. After each has spoken the class vote out one speaker. Rounds of argument continue until one speaker remains. (KS3)

## **Preparing to interview:**

- Pick a subject to focus on. This might be a locality like your school or street or a theme like shopping or leisure.
- Carry out some research about your locality or theme. Use books, photographs, maps and newspapers most of which can be found in your local library.
- Find some people to interview. This might be teachers, parents or older relatives. Or you might visit an older persons' centre or club.

Prepare a list of questions. Always ask the interviewee their date and place of birth and what their main job was. A list of questions helps guide the interview but remember you don't just have to stick to the questions.

# TEACHER'S NOTES

## **Tips on interviewing:**

- Don't make the interview too formal; treat it like a chat between friends to make the interviewee feel as comfortable as possible.
- Encourage the person you are interviewing with lots of eye contact and nodding of the head. Look interested in what they are saying!
- Listen to what the interviewee is saying so you can follow up anything particularly interesting with another question.
- Try not to interrupt the interviewee but wait for a natural break in the conversation before asking your follow up question.

## **National Curriculum and QCA links**

The content on the website can be used in many ways to support breadth and balance in the curriculum. Individual oral history clips could be used as primary source material to support many areas of the curriculum including history, geography, citizenship, literacy and ICT.

To help you make use of the web site we have created a series of activity sheets focussing on some of the themes. The activity sheets have been designed to support the Key Stage 2 QCA schemes of work in history, geography and citizenship and are particularly suited to supporting study of the local area.

### **History**

Unit 13 - How has life changed in Britain since 1948?

Unit 18 – What was it like to live here in the past?

### **Geography**

Unit 5 - Where in the world is Barnaby Bear?

# TEACHER'S NOTES

## **Citizenship**

Unit 5 – Living in a diverse world

Unit 10 – Local democracy for young citizens

The activity sheets are designed in two ways. Some sheets are for use in front of the computer, others can be used for follow up work in the classroom. Sometimes the activity sheets refer to written material on the website so extracts could be printed off the computer and used in the classroom. However this will not give pupils the experience of navigating round the website.

The Then and Now activity sheet is designed for pupils to work in pairs or small groups. It encourages pupils to think about similarities between the past and now. The exercise gives the opportunity for the pupils to think of questions they can't answer from the website and to look for other sources of information for the answer. It then encourages them to feed back the results of that research to the rest of the class. There is a teachers' help note for this activity sheet in the table below.

The activity sheets are described in the table below with the curriculum areas they address highlighted.

H = history G = geography C = citizenship

Activity Sheet	Main Curriculum Area	Where to use	Cross curricular links	Content and help
Shopping in the 1930s and 1940s	H	Computer	ICT, literacy	The five activity sheets in this section help children to look at how shopping has changed in Gravesham between the 1930s and 1950s.  Some of the sheets help the pupils collect information from the oral history accounts. Others help them reinforce the information they have learnt.
Shopping in the 30s and 40s Milton advert	H	Computer and/or classroom	ICT, literacy, art	
Shopping in the 1950s and 1960s	H	Computer	ICT, literacy	
Shopping in the 50s and 60s shop signs	H	Classroom	Art	
How shopping has changed since 1960	H	Computer	ICT, literacy	
Where in the world	H, G, C	Computer	ICT, literacy	The three activity sheets in this section look at Moving here stories and et pupils to think about how the community they live in is made up.
A postcard home	G, C	Classroom	Literacy, art	
Map it	H, G, C	Classroom	Literacy	
Then and Now Colin Ralph	H	Computer and classroom	Literacy	The five activity sheets in this section are designed for the children to use in small groups. Each group works on one memory from a different area of the website, does further research and feeds back to the rest of the class.  Each activity sheet looks at how one area of life has changed over time.
Then and Now Makhan Singh	H, C	Computer and classroom	Literacy	
Then and Now Joyce and Dora	H	Computer and classroom	Literacy	
Then and Now Maud and Alice	H	Computer and classroom	Literacy	
Then and Now Liz Howe	H	Computer and classroom	Literacy	
Oral History Interview Sheet	H, G, C	Classroom	Literacy	A sheet to use with your own oral history interviews.